

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9313
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 KABUL 6159

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PEPR, PINS, AF
SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF OPPOSITION STRENGTH TO THE TARAKI GOVT

1. SUMMARY. OVERT RESISTANCE TO THE NEW LEFTIST REGIME OF NOOR MOHAMMAD TARAKI REMAINS CONFINED TO THE EASTERN TRIBAL PROVINCES, ALTHOUGH COVERT RESISTANCE APPEARS TO BE GROWING BOTH AMONG THE MILITARY AND THE POPULATION IN GENERAL. SELF-PROCLAIMED OPPOSITION GROUPS ARE INCREASING IN NUMBER, REPORTS OF DISAFFECTION IN SOME MILITARY UNITS ARE BECOMING MORE COMMON, AND GENERAL AFGHAN UNHAPPINESS OVER GROWING SOVIET INFLUENCE APPEARS TO BE DEEP. WHETHER THESE FACTORS WILL PROVOKE A SERIOUS MOVE BY SOME GROUP AGAINST THE TARAKI LEADERSHIP IS VERY DIFFICULT TO FORECAST. IF THE REGIME CAN MAINTAIN CONTROL OF
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THE KEY ARMY UNITS IN AND AROUND KABUL -- AND OF THE AIR FORCE UNITS JUST TO THE NORTH OF THE CITY, IT CAN PROBABLY CONSOLIDATE ITS SECURITY, ALTHOUGH THIS WILL REQUIRE PROTRACTED EFFORTS AND THE AVOIDANCE OF MAJOR POLITICAL MISCALCULATIONS ON TARAKI'S PART. END OF SUMMARY.

2. OVERT RESISTANCE TO THE REGIME IS GENERALLY LIMITED TO

TRIBAL AREAS: CONFIRMED REPORTS OF RESISTANCE TO THE LEFTIST REGIME OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN (DRA) ARE FEW. RUMORS ARE RIFE, HOWEVER, THAT TARAKI AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE UNPOPULAR, ENJOY VERY LIMITED SUPPORT AMONG CIVILIANS OR MILITARY, AND MAY BE ON THEIR WAY OUT TO BE REPLACED BY SOME SORT OF LEFTIST-NATIONALIST-MILITARY GOVT.

3. VIOLENT RESISTANCE TO THE LEFTIST DRA REGIME CONTINUES IN SOME OF THE EASTERN TRIBAL AREAS, ALTHOUGH WE HEAR THAT SOME KIND OF TRUCE NOW PREVAILS IN PAKTIA PROVINCE. AFGHAN AIR FORCE STRIKES AT "INSURGENT" VILLAGES ARE REPORTED TO HAVE DESTROYED WHOLE VILLAGES. THE AFGHAN ARMY IS ALSO REPORTEDLY USING HEAVY WEAPONS AGAINST CIVILIAN OPPOSITION. RESISTANCE ACTIVITIES APPEAR TO BE LIMITED TO ISOLATED ACTS OF SNIPING, SABOTAGE, OR ATTACKS ON SMALL GROUPS OF GOVT SOLDIERS -- OR SOVIET ADVISERS. THERE IS NO INDICATION, AS YET, THAT ANY ORGANIZED ANTI-GOVT FORCE IS OPERATING IN THESE AREAS, ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE REPORTS THAT MANY VILLAGERS HAVE TAKEN TO THE HILLS WITH THEIR WEAPONS. FOR THE MOMENT, THESE INSURGENT ACTIVITIES REPRESENT NO SERIOUS MILITARY THREAT TO THE REGIME. ON THE POLITICAL PLANE, HOWEVER, THE REGIME'S INABILITY TO WOO OR BLUDGEON THESE AREAS INTO ACCEPTING CENTRAL GOVT AUTHORITY MAY HAVE FAR-REACHING REPERCUSSIONS. THE REAL TEST SHOULD COME AFTER THE HARVEST IS GATHERED THIS AUTUMN, ALTHOUGH UNCONFIRMED REPORTS CONTEND THAT SOMETHING MAY BREAK OUT EARLIER. WINTER HAS BEEN THE TRADITIONAL TIME FOR INTERNAL
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WARFARE IN AFGHANISTAN.

4. OUTSIDE THESE PROVINCIAL AREAS -- WHICH HAVE BEEN TESTY REGIONS FOR CENTRAL GOVTS THROUGHOUT AFGHANISTAN'S HISTORY -- REPORTS OF VIOLENT RESISTANCE TO THE TARAKI REGIME HAVE BEEN FEW. THE CAPITAL HAS REMAINED OUTWARDLY CALM, BUT SHOOTING IS HEARD IN AND AROUND KABUL ALMOST EVERY NIGHT. IN ONE RECENT INCIDENT, SEVERAL SHOTS WERE FIRED BY A T-34 TANK CREW AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF AN INFANTRY DIVISION STATIONED JUST OUTSIDE THE CITY. NO INJURIES WERE APPARENTLY INFLICTED AND THE TANK CREW WAS SUBSEQUENTLY ARRESTED.

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

5. COVERT RESISTANCE APPARENTLY GROWING: BENEATH THE SURFACE, HOWEVER, OPPOSITION TO THE REGIME MAY BE WIDE-SPREAD AMONG CIVILIANS AS WELL AS THE MILITARY. OPPOSITION IS STRONGEST AMONG THE RELIGIOUSLY DEVOUT SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION, ALTHOUGH THE DRA'S INCREASINGLY CLOSE SOVIET TIES ALSO RAISE MANY AFGHANS' HACKLES. RECURRENT RUMORS CLAIM THAT THE GOVT IS STEADILY ARRESTING SCORES OF MULLAHS IN ORDER TO ELIMINATE THIS POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP GROUP. IN THIS CONNECTION, FORMER DEPUTY MINISTER OF INTERIOR FAZL RABI PAZHWAK, SHORTLY BEFORE HE WAS DISMISSED ON JULY 17, WAS RELIABLY REPORTED TO HAVE SAID THAT "WE ARE ARRESTING HUNDREDS OF MULLAHS, BUT I DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THEM."

6. RELIGION ALSO APPEARS TO BE A PRINCIPAL CAUSE FOR MUCH OF THE DISCONTENT WITHIN THE MILITARY, ALTHOUGH NATIONALIST FEELINGS
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ALSO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE WITHIN THIS GROUP. MEMBERS OR SYMPATHIZERS OF THE IKHWAN-I-MUSLIMIN (MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD) HAVE CAUSED AFGHAN REGIMES HEADACHES IN THE PAST (DAOUD WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE CONCERNED ABOUT A RIGHTIST THREAT FROM THIS GROUP, RATHER THAN ONE FROM THE LEFT, WHICH ELIMINATED HIM), BUT THE BROTHERHOOD AT PRESENT APPARENTLY LACKS A TIGHTLY DISCIPLINED ORGANIZATION. IT IS REPORTEDLY TRYING TO RECTIFY THIS SITUATION, HOWEVER, ESPECIALLY WITHIN THE MILITARY WHICH HAS ALWAYS CONTAINED MORE THAN ITS SHARE OF IKHWANIS. THE IKHWAN MOVEMENT ALSO LACKS AT THIS TIME

A SINGLE LEADER WHO COULD ATTRACT WIDESPREAD POPULAR SUPPORT, ALTHOUGH BURHANUDDIN RABANI, SELF-PROCLAIMED LEADER OF THE "NATIONAL FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF AFGHANISTAN" (KABUL 4602) COULD EVENTUALLY FILL THIS ROLE.

7. OPPOSITION "GROUPS" APPEAR TO BE PROLIFERATING (KABUL 5413) BOTH INSIDE AFGHANISTAN AND, REPORTEDLY, IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. THE STRENGTH AND SIZE OF THESE SELF-PROFESSED "LIBERATION" ORGANIZATIONS ARE DIFFICULT TO ASSESS, AND IT IS EQUALLY UNCLEAR WHETHER THEY HAVE ACTUALLY UNDERTAKEN ANY ANTI-REGIME ACTIONS. WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE REPORTS, HOWEVER, THAT VARIOUS COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY PLOTS HAVE BEEN UNCOVERED BY THE AUTHORITIES AND MANY MILITARY PERSONNEL HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. IN THIS REGARD, CONVINCING REPORTS INDICATE THAT SOME SORT OF ANTI-REGIME ACTION WAS MOUNTED IN KABUL DURING THE NIGHT OF JULY 23-24, BUT THAT THE MANEUVER FIZZLED AND THE COLONEL LEADING THE MOVEMENT AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. SOME REPORTS CLAIM THAT MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SWEEPED UP AS A RESULT OF THIS ABORTED ACTION. THIS INCIDENT COINCIDED WITH A VERY TOUGH ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE REGIME THAT THE NIGHTLY CURFEW CONTINUED IN EFFECT AND THAT VIOLATORS WOULD BE SHOT. THUS, THE GOVT APPARENTLY BELIEVES THREATS TO ITS SECURITY DO, IN FACT, EXIST, AND THAT FIRM STEPS

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HAVE TO BE TAKEN IN RESPONSE.

8. DISAFFECTION AND DISILLUSIONMENT MAY ACTUALLY PROVE TO BE THE REGIME'S ACHILLES' HEEL: GENERAL DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE DIRECTIONS IN WHICH THE REGIME IS DEVELOPING, AND DISAFFECTION WITHIN THE MILITARY OVER THEIR "COSSACK" ROLE IN POUNDING ON CIVILIAN INSURGENTS WHO ARE THEIR FELLOW COUNTRYMEN, COULD EVENTUALLY PROVE MORE DANGEROUS TO THE TARAHI REGIME THAN OUT-RIGHT OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS ORGANIZED BY THE RIGHT OR BY RELIGIOUS REACTIONARIES. THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS REPORTS THAT DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL ABDUL QADER, AMONG OTHERS, HAS ALREADY EXPRESSED HIS UNHAPPINESS OVER WHAT HE CONSIDERED A "BETRAYAL" OF THE REVOLUTION BY THE CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP. PERHAPS IN RESPONSE TO QADER'S COMPLAINTS, THE REGIME APPEARS TO BE TAKING CONCRETE STEPS TO ESTABLISH ITS FIRM CONTROL OVER THE MILITARY AND TO GIVE VIRTUALLY FULL CREDIT FOR OUSTING THE DAOUD REGIME TO THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF AFGHANISTAN (PDPA). IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER QADER (WHO REMAINS AN ENIGMA, BUT WHO WE BELIEVE POSSESSES STRONG NATIONALIST FEELINGS ALONG WITH HIS LEFTIST-REFORMIST VIEWS) AND OTHER LIKE-MINDED MILITARY OFFICERS WILL ACCEPT A PROLONGED SECONDARY STATUS, AS WELL AS THE EVOLUTION OF AFGHANISTAN TOWARD A SOCIALIST STATE WITH VERY STRONG TIES WITH THE USSR.

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9. REPORTS OF DISAFFECTION IN THE RANKS HAVE ALSO SURFACED, FEELINGS WHICH HAVE SUPPOSEDLY BEEN REFLECTED BY THE REPORTED DEFECTIONS OF SEVERAL AFGHAN FIGHTER AIRCRAFT TO PAKISTAN, AS WELL AS BY INCREASING DESERTIONS AMONG ARMY TROOPS. RELIABLE REPORTS ALSO INDICATE THAT A NUMBER OF FIGHTER PILOTS ARE BECOMING VERY UNHAPPY WITH THEIR ORDERS TO ATTACK AND DESTROY UNARMED CIVILIAN VILLAGES, SOME OF WHICH MAY CONTAIN FAMILY OR TRIBAL RELATIVES.

10. ANTI-RUSSIAN EMOTIONS REPORTEDLY ARE RUNNING HIGH: HISTORICALLY, RUSSIANS HAVE NEVER BEEN VERY LOVED IN AFGHANISTAN, PROBABLY BECAUSE THE AFGHANS HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT ITS NORTHERN NEIGHBOR COVETED THIS COUNTRY AS A LOGICAL STEP IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE'S SOUTHWARD EXPANSION. FOLLOWING THE ADVENT OF THE "UNBELIEVERS" OF THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION, THESE HOSTILITIES DEEPENED AS MANY REFUGEES SETTLED IN NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN AFTER HAVING FLED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNISM
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IN SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA.

11. THE RAPID INFLUX OF SOVIET MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ADVISERS FOLLOWING THE APRIL REVOLUTION HERE HAS NETTLED MANY AFGHANS, AND HAS RESULTED IN A PLETHORA OF OF REPORTS THAT THESE SOVIETS HAVE BEEN DECLARED FAIR GAME FOR INSURGENTS. ACCORDING TO RUMORS, SEVERAL INCIDENTS HAVE OCCURRED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE WHICH HAVE RESULTED IN THE DEATHS OF MORE THAN TWENTY SOVIET ADVISERS. WE CAN ONLY CONFIRM, HOWEVER, THAT THREE SOVIETS HAVE DIED HERE SINCE APRIL, ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT SURE WHETHER THESE DEATHS WERE CAUSED BY DELIBERATE ACTIONS OR BY ACCIDENTS.

12. IN THE BIGGER PICTURE, THE REGIME'S INCREASINGLY CLOSE EMBRACE OF THE SOVIETS COULD PROVOKE A RESURGENCE OF AFGHAN NATIONALISM, AND THUS PROMPT A MOVEMENT TO OUST THE TARAKI REGIME IN FAVOR OF A MORE NATIONALIST, ALTHOUGH STILL LEFTIST (PERHAPS MILITARY) GOVT. WE BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIETS ARE VERY LIKELY TO RESPOND TO REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE OR EVEN INTERVENTION IF THE REGIME WERE OPENLY THREATENED BY PAKISTANI OR IRANIAN SUBVERSION, OR IF TARAKI WERE FACED DOMESTICALLY WITH A SERIOUS RIGHTIST OR REACTIONARY MOVEMENT. OTHERWISE, THE SOVIETS COULD PROBABLY LIVE WITH A CHANGE IN REGIMES HERE IF IT INVOLVED TARAKI'S REPLACEMENT BY SOMEONE LIKE GENERAL QADER, WHOSE LEFTIST CREDENTIALS ARE ALSO PROBABLY SATISFACTORY TO MOSCOW.

13. NEAR-TERM PROGNOSIS REMAINS CLOUDY: DESPITE EVIDENCE THAT DISSATISFACTION WITH THE REGIME IS WIDESPREAD AND THAT SOME FACTIONS ARE ATTEMPTING TO ORGANIZE COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ACTIONS, WE BELIEVE THAT THE TARAKI REGIME HAS A GOOD CHANCE OF SURVIVING IF IT RETAINS THE LOYALTY OF ESSENTIAL MILITARY UNITS. IN THE SHORT TERM, THE MOST LIKELY THREAT TO THE REGIME COULD COME FROM A LEADERSHIP SPLIT ALONG CIVILIAN-CONFIDENTIAL

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MILITARY LINES, RATHER THAN FROM AN INTRAMILITARY SCHISM, PRODUCING RENEWED CIVIL CONFLICT. SHOULD A UNIFIED AFGHAN MILITARY CONTRONT TARAKI WITH A FAIT ACCOMPLI, SERIOUS VIOLENCE WOULD NOT LIKELY BREAK OUT, AND THE SOVIETS MIGHT NOT REACT MILITARILY IF THEIR READING WAS THAT THE NEW GROUP HAD A LEFTIST BENT. THE AFGHAN MILITARY MAY DIVIDE, HOWEVER, AND COULD THEREBY PRECIPITATE A DANGEROUS AND POSSIBLY VIOLENT SITUATION THEATENING CIVIL WAR. THIS COULD LEAD TT A REQUEST FOR SOVIET INTERVENTION, WHICH UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD THREATEN OVERALL U.S. REGIONAL INTERESTS, AS WELL AS AMERICAN PERSONNEL WITHIN THE COUNTRY.

14. A MAJOR OBSTACLE WE FACE IN ASSESSING THE REGIME'S DURABILITY IS THE PAUCITY OF HARD INFORMATION REGARDING WHAT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING IN KABUL AND THE COUNTRYSIDE, THE MOST SENSITIVE REGIONS OF WHICH ARE OFF LIMITS TO FOREIGNERS.

AFGHANISTAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN EXTREMELY PROLIFIC RUMOR MILL, BUT SINCE APRIL THE RATE AT WHICH UNCONFIRMED STORIES ARE PRODUCED AND EXPANDED HAS SEEMINGLY GROWN GEOMETRICALLY. ONLY THE WILDEST RUMORS CAN BE DISREGARDED COMPLETELY, AND THE REMAINING REPORTS THAT ARE PLAUSIBLE AND HEARD FROM A NUMBER OF PARTIES, BUT WHICH ARE UNCONFIRMED BY RELIABLE SOURCES, ARE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO ASSESS ACCURATELY. NEVERTHELESS, OUR POC-REVOLUTION EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT SEVERAL EVENTS WHICH HAVE INITIALLY SURFACED AS UNFOUNDED RUMORS EVENTUALLY HAVE EMERGED AS FACT (E.G., THE EXILING OF BABRAK KARMAL TO PRAGUE).

15. MATTERS ARE CLEARLY SIMMERING AND COULD QUICKLY BOIL OVER AT ANY TIME.
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